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AN ASSESSMENT OF RADIO MARTI AS A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL INSTRUMENT OF POWER

An Individual Study Project
Intended for Publication

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by

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Project Advisor



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U.S. Army War College
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It is the policy of the United States to support the right of the people of Cuba to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers. Truth in broadcasting has been an effective tool in assisting repressed nations in this endeavor. Radio Marti, named after Jose' Marti, a Cuban patriot killed in Cuba's war of independence from Spain, has proven to be a valuable asset in this regard. Although coming under the heading of socio-psychological instrument of power, its effect on the populace of Cuba has been immense. This radio station that broadcasts from Washington, D.C. was the idea of a Cuban emigre that escaped from the repression of Fidel Castro. Little did he know the far reaching consequences it would have in supporting the Cuban people in their quest for freedom and truth. Today, the Cuban people are provided the opportunity to listen to the truth and as a result are able to decide for themselves what democracy really means. (S)

Radio Marti went on the air 20 May 1985 from broadcast studios in Washington, D.C. This paper will depict Radio Marti from its genesis, through its utilization, the ways and means that brought it about and ultimately assess its effectiveness as a socio-psychological instrument of power.

Radio Marti is the living dream of a Cuban emigre named Jorge Mas. Mr. Mas arrived in the United States in 1960, one of more than a million Cubans who fled their homeland after its takeover by Fidel Castro.¹ The next year he joined the army of exiles that invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. Upon return from this unsuccessful operation Mr. Mas came back to Miami and worked at various jobs. In 1970 he went to work for a construction company and a year later with the help of a bank loan he bought out the firm. Due to hard work and dedication his company was soon doing \$20 million a year in business. He and his wife were then able to settle down to a more comfortable way of life. Mas had occasion to meet with people who had just arrived from Cuba and was astounded to find that they virtually knew nothing of the outside world. They had not been told of the American landings on the moon, nor were they told that Stalin's daughter had sought asylum in the

United States. With this in mind Mas and many of his friends that emigrated from Cuba made a concerted effort to lobby Congress in order to get legislation passed that would allow for broadcasting to Cuba. His premise was that if Cuba could not be invaded by tanks, then a war of bombardment of the truth would be the next best tactic. Mas and his friends all agreed that Radio Marti be named in honor of Jose Marti, a Cuban patriot killed in Cuba's war of independence from Spain.²

Jose' Marti' was born in Havana on 28 January 1853. In 1874 he received his degree in philosophy and law from the University of Zaragoza. Much has been written regarding Marti's attitude toward the United States. His writings have been taken out of context to show him as anti-yankee, or to portray him as an advocate of a Latin America in the image of the United States. The truth lies somewhere in between the two extremes. Marti' admired the accomplishments of the United States, but at the same time he saw it as a society in which, according to him, man placed too much emphasis on material wealth and on his selfish interests.³ Marti' was a citizen of America and was

not so absorbed in the task of bringing about Cuba's independence that he became narrow-minded and lost touch with events and reality. He thought of himself as a son of America and felt indebted to her. The war for Cuba's independence that Marti' supported was not quickly won. It took his life in early 1895.

No one occupies an analogous place in the history of the United States. It would require a composite of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln, supplemented by the best of Henry James, Emerson, and Twain to suggest a comparable figure.'

After a great deal of time and effort on the steps of the Capital and in the halls of Congress Mr. Mas was able to convince his Congressional friends that this effort was worthwhile and should be further developed. On September 22, 1981 President Reagan issued Executive Order 12323 creating a presidential commission to develop recommendations with respect to broadcasting of information and ideas to Cuba. After announcing the establishment of the commission, National Security Advisor Richard V. Allen read a statement on behalf of the President. The administration had decided to break the Cuban Government's control of information in Cuba

by supporting establishment of radio broadcasting to Cuba. The bill to authorize support for Radio Broadcasting to Cuba was introduced in the Senate on 16 November, 1981 and the House of Representatives on 2 February 1982. The original bill was presented to the Committee on Foreign Relations by Senator Charles Percy upon request of the Department of State. On 1 July 1982, the Committee held a hearing to consider and ultimately recommend approval of the creation of Radio Marti.

With the opening of the 98th Congress, new legislation was introduced by Senator Paula Hawkins. Senate Bill 602 would authorize the Board for International Broadcasting to provide federal funds for radio broadcasting to Cuba. President Reagan signed it into law on October 4, 1983. However, more than a year passed and no progress was being made in getting Radio Marti' on the air. Mr. Mas found that three members of the Reagan administration were tying up the project: Secretary of State George P. Shultz; Robert McFarlane, head of the National Security Council; and his deputy, Admiral John M. Pointdexter. They were concerned that Castro would retaliate with electronic warfare and the

United States would have to back down or perhaps respond militarily. It would be easier to put off Radio Marti' indefinitely. Radio Marti' seemed to have been dealt a serious setback.

Charles Z. Wick, Director of the U.S. Information Agency, took charge. He announced that Radio Marti would start broadcasting on Cuba's independence day--20 May 1985. Shultz and the others took their case to the President. President Reagan took all into consideration and his decision was to begin the broadcasting as scheduled.⁶ As a result, the Director of the United States Information Agency was ordered to establish within the Voice of America a Cuba Service responsible for all radio broadcasting to Cuba. The agency was directed to administer the service separately from other Voice of America functions. The head of the Cuba Services was required to report directly to the director for broadcasting of the United States Information Agency.

Radio Marti's main studios are located in Washington, D.C. A satellite studio operates in Miami, Florida. Its transmitter on Marathon Key, south of Miami, broadcasts at 1180 kilohertz on the AM band.

Radio Marti' also broadcasts on a sequence of five shortwave radio frequencies over Voice of America transmitters located in Greenville, North Carolina, and Bethany, Ohio.

As stated in the legislation, the rationale for the establishment of Radio Marti' has as its foundation "that it is the policy of the United States to support the right of the people of Cuba to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers, in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." By law, Radio Marti' broadcasts must be in accordance "with all Voice of America standards to ensure the broadcast of programs that are objective, accurate, balanced and which represent a variety of views."

Radio Marti' has several objectives: To be effective in furthering the open communication of information and ideas through use of radio broadcasting to Cuba; and to serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of accurate, objective, and comprehensive news. The third goal is to function in accordance with all Voice of America standards, and to broadcast programs which present a variety of views.*

On the issue of human rights Radio Marti's ongoing coverage was made even more apparent during September 1988, when the United Nations Human Rights Commission visited Cuba. The visit was to follow up on charges of abuses in Cuba, particularly in the prison system. In addition, Radio Marti' developed a regularly scheduled program, 'Derechos Humanos,' which premiered in February 1988. Many Cubans learned for the first time from Radio Marti' that a human rights movement existed within the country. And in perhaps the most amazing first-person documentary aired by Radio Marti' to date, a Cuban political prisoner spoke on a tape smuggled out from his prison cell. In his own words and voice, Alfredo Mustelier told of abuses he had personally borne, giving the names of those who had beaten him and the dates. After the broadcast, the station forwarded a copy of the tape to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva.'

The effectiveness of Radio Marti in promoting those objectives has been beyond expectations. When Radio Marti' first began transmitting it was on the air for 14.5 hours a day. The programs consisted of news, information and entertainment broadcasting. Radio

Marti' increased to 17.5 hours of programming on 10 February 1986, less than one year after its beginning. As of 15 March 1989 the Cuban people are provided the opportunity to listen to Radio Marti 24 hours a day. The station acknowledges that it does broadcast news of successful crossings from Cuba to the U.S. but it also warns of sharks, sunburn, dehydration and other hazards, and alerts would-be raft people that their lives would be in danger. Pablo Betancourt, a Cuban emigre, made the crossing on a raft. He stated that Radio Marti encouraged him to make the crossing.*

The Communist government of Cuba realizes that its main enemy is information. For that reason Cuba omits, silences, and censors all radio and television news programming. The commotion that the appearance of Radio Marti' caused was so great in Cuba that Castro strove to bring on to state controlled radio and television many important figures in art and sports and had them make statements against Radio Marti'. The official propaganda against " U.S. imperialism and its leaders" had become sweeping, but attention was never called to those prominent figures who might have been in conflict with the revolution, much less its

ideological opponents. The names of dissidents Huber Matos and Carlos Franqui, two of Castro's comrades-in-arms in the revolutionary war against Batista and Cuban revolutionary protagonists, were erased forever from the consciousness of the Cuban people. The new generations never learned of them and the older generation forget them. For that reason, when the enemy assumes a physical form and a name, with a presence in foreign broadcasts, Fidel Castro knows that he has not totally won the battle.⁹

Castro's reaction to the Radio Marti broadcasting was as anticipated. He initially suspended the Migration Act of 1984. It had been in existence only 5 months when the Radio Marti program went on the air. Suspension of the Migration Act was greeted with great dismay in the United States exile community which had high expectations of family reunification and freeing of political prisoners. Havana underestimated if it believed that these persons would become an effective lobby against Radio Marti'. The exiles and, especially, their assertive spokesmen were also the firmest supporters of the radio.¹⁰

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery,

Radio Marti' has done very well. Six weeks after Radio Marti' began its 30 minute nightly news show in May 1988, Cuban government stations also started an in-depth newscast. To this extent, it can be said that Cuban listeners are better informed because of Radio Marti' and are forcing the government to be more responsive in keeping them informed. Because of Radio Marti's success, Castro ordered a 1,000 per cent increase in radio and television spending in the following five years. "The Cuban stations only say what the state wants...You could be listening or watching novelas, and they always had a political message."¹ His concern with countering the popular Radio Marti has been the subject of many high level meetings within his Communist government.

Some supporters of Radio Marti would like it to go even farther. Jose' Diaz in an editorial in the magazine, Mensajes, reproached the radio for not calling Castro a "thug," "murderer," "killer," or "gangster," and for referring to him by his titles of "President of Cuba" or "Secretary General of the Communist Party." When Radio Marti' first went on the air there were reports of monetary fines and other

reprisals taken by the government against listeners. Reprisals included reprimand meetings and short jail terms. A notification was circulated among the population asking them to identify Radio Marti' listeners and to report them to the police. There were also reports of workers losing their positions when caught listening to the station while on the job. However, as time went on reports of active government measures against Radio Marti' listeners have decreased. Although Radio Marti' is expressly prohibited from inciting its audience to revolution or violence and scrupulously avoids doing so, the London Sunday Times reported that "the greatest act of rebellion that young Cubans can resort to is listening to Radio Marti'--at full volume, with the windows wide open." A European diplomat in Havana quoted in the London Sunday Times said that a mid-day soap opera and a 3 P.M. TV news broadcast would cause the country to "come to a halt to watch them, and the revolution will fall apart." "It seems that the primary motivation for the listeners of Radio Marti' is the search for reliable news that addresses the domestic and international issues that are relevant to Cuba. There is strong skepticism

among the Cuban populace as to the veracity and objectivity of the news that is provided by the state run media.

Apart from the opinions of Radio Marti' listeners in Cuba, the program has a basic value for the U.S. Arising from the conviction among U.S. citizens that broadcasting the truth to the Cuban people will assist them in developing a powerful weapon in the struggle for freedom.¹³ Consequently, Radio Marti has additional significance as a foreign policy asset of the U.S.

The cost of Radio Marti has been minimal in relation to its results and its extraordinary impact on the morale of the Cuban people. In 1984, \$10 million was appropriated for the radio station. In the past seven years the requested funding has only increased slightly. The 1990 request is for \$12.7 million.¹⁴ As mentioned earlier, Radio Marti is presently broadcasting 24 hours a day. Recently, after Radio Marti introduced an in-depth news show, the state controlled Radio Rebelde countered with its own news/talk show that aired directly opposite the Radio Marti' program. This was an effort to "scoop" the Radio

Marti newscast. In yet another first, the station provided live coverage of major news events--the visits of the Pope and General Secretary Gorbachev to the United States. Radio Marti' also followed very closely the war in Angola and Nicaragua and made a distinct effort to provide its listeners with up to date information about these two war situations where Cuban young men were risking their lives on behalf of Castro's foreign policy and Soviet interests.

While conducting research on Radio Marti' I interviewed the Director of the Radio Marti, Mr. Ernesto Betancourt. Mr. Betancourt has been the Director of Radio Marti' since September 1985 and is prominently qualified to hold his current position. Mr. Betancourt came to this country at the age of twenty and returned to Cuba in 1957 to work for Castro. He was the representative in Washington for the 26th of July movement during the insurrection against Batista and acted as Castro's spokesman and press contact. His responsibilities included maintaining informal liaison with embassies, the State Department and Congressional offices. Mr. Betancourt also participated in the revolutionary government during its first year. He was

the principal advisor to Castro during his visit to the United States in April 1959. Mr. Betancourt resigned upon appointment of Che Guevara to head the Central Bank. Prior to assuming his position with Radio Marti', Mr. Betancourt has been a member of Georgetown's Center for Strategic and International Studies' Cuba Project Working Group and also a member of the Board of Human Rights.

Mr. Betancourt was a wealth of knowledge regarding Radio Marti' and was able to expound on specific issues for which I was unable to find information during my research.

The decision to locate Radio Marti' in Washington, D.C. was made to be sure it would not be affected by exile politics in the Miami area. The drawback to this is that the manpower base is outside the city, resulting in the need to hire from the Miami area; this results in a great deal of personnel turbulence. When I queried Mr. Betancourt as to his thoughts on the effectiveness of Radio Marti,' he responded that it has reached a degree of audience penetration that even he had not anticipated. Castro no longer has the monopoly of information that he once controlled. The station is

now a part of the Cuban lifestyle. In fact when the history of Cuba is written there will be two periods-- one before and one after Radio Marti'. As a result of Radio Marti's popularity another benefit has been provided to the Cuban people. A Family Reach program has been instituted in which any Cuban emigre who has family in Cuba can call a toll free number and request information on their loved ones in Cuba. Radio Marti then will pursue the requested information within its capabilities. They are occasionally unsuccessful in their search for the requested information due to limitations placed on them by The Voice of America regulations and a limited budget.

Mr. Betancourt relayed to me a story of a Cuban emigre who had been a political prisoner for 25 years. The man came to visit Mr. Betancourt when he was released from prison and permitted to leave Cuba for the United States. He relayed to Mr. Betancourt his thanks and related his feelings upon hearing his name, that he had not been abandoned, and was not alone in his quest for freedom. He stated that had it not been for Radio Marti' he would not have been able to survive his last five years in captivity. Mr. Betancourt

stated this was his most rewarding moment since arriving at Radio Marti' and he felt that no price could be put on something so significant.

In closing Mr. Betancourt stated that he felt we have not heard the last of Castro. He thinks that as a result of Glasnost, Castro is threatened and may possibly become a catalyst for some type of political or military activity in the area. He did not specify exactly what may occur but felt we should not take Castro lightly in the years ahead.

Recently, Castro has been connected with the Sandinistas and the FMLN. Castro and the Sandinistas-- - who together arm, aid, and often direct the FMLN --- are furious. They are worried that Mikhail Gorbachev will force them to democratize, just as he did East Germany and Bulgaria. One also cannot underestimate the fear and loss felt by Castro and the Sandinistas as they watch a formerly dependable Stalinist country such as East Germany, which over the years has provided them a great deal of their assistance, now head toward liberalization. The bitter uprising in El Salvador then becomes a way to preempt Gorbachev's plan for change in this hemisphere. For Castro, it is also a

way of embarrassing Gorbachev and showing the Soviet leader the degree to which Castro can upset his desired new relations with the United States and even wait him and his reforms out.¹⁸

The impact of Radio Marti has been prevalent throughout Cuba. Initially, Cuban media blamed AIDS on the United States government and claimed that the scourge was transmitted from the United States and was endemic only in capitalist countries. However, as Radio Marti gained listeners and proved its trustworthiness, those claims were silenced. The most recent Cuban literature allows that AIDS was prevalent in Africa in the mid-1950s.

Radio Marti programming has resulted in a Cuban population that is now more informed and better able to understand what is transpiring in the outside world. Radio Marti is the station of the people, they no longer fear tuning it in. The Castro government realizes that it must provide truth in broadcasting and is being forced to be more responsive in keeping them informed.

"Thanks to Radio Marti, our country has ceased to be a closed society in the truest sense...through its

airwaves the oxygen of information...reaches the island".¹⁸ The possibility of providing further media coverage to Cuba is in the offing. TV Marti is now being discussed and may well become a reality in the near future. Keeping the suppressed populace of Cuba informed will continue to be a goal of the United States. As an instrument of power, the socio-psychological effects of truth in broadcasting will continue to be a major factor in furthering the cause of democracy.

ENDNOTES

1. David Reed, "Good Morning, Cuba." Readers Digest, October 1988, p. 27.
2. Ibid., p.28.
3. Jaime Suchlicki, Cuba From Columbus to Castro, Washington D.C., Pergamon-Brassey, 1968, p.77.
4. Ramon Eduardo Ruiz, Cuba, The Making of a Revolution, University of Massachusetts Press, 1968, p. 59.
5. Reed, p.32.
6. United States Information Agency, USIA Program and Budget in Brief Fiscal year 1900, Washington, D.C., p. 35.
7. Report by the Advisory Board for Radio Broadcasting to Cuba, submitted to President George Bush, 1989. p. 2.
8. Terry Johnson, "Adrift: Cuba's Raft People." Newsweek, July 21, 1986. p.21.
9. Belkis C. Male,' "Radio Marti: A Cuban Poets

Reflections," Journal of Contemporary Studies, Vol. VIII, No.2 Spring/Summer 1985, p. 124.

10. Kenneth N. Skoug, "The US-Cuba Migration Agreement: Resolving Mariel." Department of State Bulletin, Vol. 88, No. 2134, p. 79.

11. Report by the Advisory Board for Radio Broadcasting to Cuba, submitted to President George Bush. p. 11.

12. Ibid., p. 2.

13. Male', p. 127.

14. United States Information Agency, USIA Program and Budget in Brief Fiscal Year 1990, p. 35.

15. Georgie Ann Geyer, "These are quite desperate times for Castro and the Sandinistas." The Patriot News, 22 November 1989. p. 9.

16. Report by the Advisory Board for Radio Broadcasting to Cuba, submitted to President George Bush. p. 17.